



“SORRY, I DID NOT READ THIS ARTICLE”: A MISSING LINK BETWEEN THE NOBEL PRIZE COMMITTEE AND SCIENTISTS

We, at the Bulgarian Society for Cell Biology and *Biomedical Reviews*, support the petition of the Romanian scientist Gheorghe Benga (see pages IX-XI), to be appreciated as a discoverer of the first water channel protein, later named aquaporin 1 (see *Dance Round* on pages 107-112). Instead, the Nobel Committee did honor Peter Agre, not Benga, with the Nobel Prize-2003. In fact, both Benga and Agre should be jointly awarded a Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine (not for chemistry, as being judged for Agre). Actually, both scientists are leading “aqueous” peers with one difference between them: Benga was responsible for the discovery work that led to the concept of the plasma membrane’s water channel proteins, whereas Agre furthered the story.

An ethical question thus pressingly awaits its proper answer: why the Nobel Committee has, not for the first time, neglected the first scientist(s) in the field? Historically, Nobel Committee has also victimized other scientists who indeed inventively contributed to a given scientific topic. For instance, the discovery of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) was a tale of frictional competition and intrigue, told one way in James Watson’s book *The Double Helix*, and quite another in Anne Sayre’s study, *Rosalind Franklin and DNA*. Today, 45 year after James Watson, Francis Crick, and Maurice Wilkins received Nobel Prize for the double-helix model of DNA in 1962, a debate about the amount of credit due to Rosalind Elsie Franklin (1920-1958) continues. In fact, her crystallographic portraits of DNA were “the most beau-

tiful X-ray photographs of any substance ever taken” (JD Bernal’s evaluation). Unfortunately, she was beaten to publication by Crick, Watson and Wilkins, her paper being appeared as a supporting article in the same issue of *Nature*.

Nikola Tesla, the holder of more than 700 patents (including for the radio and radar) was also disappointed by the Nobel Committee. While his discovery of the rotating magnetic field was the basis of practically all alternating-current machinery, it was not he but Guglielmo Marconi and Carl Ferdinand Braun who were honored with a Nobel Prize in 1909 (for wireless telegraph). Likewise, the Romanian endocrinologist Nicolae Paulescu (also Canadian young scientist, Charles Best) were discriminated in favor of Banting and Macleod in 1923 (for the discovery of insulin) and Salvador Moncada was in duplicate neglected (for the discovery of both prostacyclin and nitric oxide).

Though “the joy of doing science and developing scientific understanding greatly exceeds the importance of being first, or even of always being right” (1), we should not tolerate such a miscalculation of one’s contribution to the science. Believe that Alfred Nobel will be much disappointed if learns that is repeatedly happened with his noble donation of more than 4 million dollars for the progress of science. Unfortunately, we are not yet ready to honor anyone with a Nobel Prize for ethic in science.

1. Anfinsen *et al.* *Trends Biochem Sci* 1993; 18: 364-365.